

SRI AUROBINDO: ROLE TO ENRICH INDIA AND INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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The Littérateurs and literature lovers while going through the literature of Sri Aurobindo, try to get the reply or clue to a query, about his uncommon personality: Some find the determination of a Superman in him, call him a devotee or practitioner of ‘Purna – Yoga’, the master of – ‘Life Divine’: some get attracted towards his patriotism, the staunch supporter of nationalism; and many a people regard him as a person of great intellectuality, well versed in the Vedas; besides Sri Aurobindo is known for his laudable literary output and taste: a writer, a dramatist and a poet of feelings and ideas.

The current of expressions of lively, curious Indians have flowed in Indian English Literature with great force. The Indian writers, adopting English as their medium of expression of feelings, ideas and thoughts, have spread Indian value, knowledge and philosophy all where the world and those writings are grouped under Indian English Literature. Defining Indian English Literature, M.K. Naik in the book “A History of Indian English Literature” writes – “Indian English Literature may be defined as literature written originally in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality (2).”

In this literature, English is used according to the Indian themes and the aspects of Indian literary creativity. In Indian English Literature, we find impact and influence of British Literature; which is obvious because of long British ‘imperialism’ or ‘colonialism’. This literature is not totally ‘Indianised’ but it is on the way to get the notion. A number of Indian English Litterateurs are successful on their praise – worthy endeavour. It is really a matter of pride to see Indian English Literature taught in many foreign universities.

It can undoubtedly, be said that Sri Aurobindo’s personality and creativity is nonpareil in Indian English Literature. Rabindranath, besides modern Bengali literature, made a remarkable impact on English literature too, but, Sri Aurobindo was not only a writer who wrote in English but, in real sense of saying, he was genuinely an English writer. It is uneasy to honour him for his acclaimed contribution to a single genre; he was not one or two in one but many in one- a Writer, poet, philosopher, Master and path finder: an eternal diamond.

Sri Aurobindo was born on 15th August, 1872 in Calcutta (Now Kolkata). His father Krishnadhan Ghosh was a renowned physician. His mother, Swarnalata Devi was the daughter of

Raj Narayan Rai, who was a multi-cultural product of Indian Renaissance (Vedic, Islamic, European). His father had got his education in foreign countries which inclined him towards European education. He arranged to send Aurobindo to Manchester, London. He took lessons of English, Greek, Latin and History there. Aurobindo got the prestigious 'Butterworth' award for literature while staying in London. His literature reflects his multi-faceted study. He has a unique position in Indian English Literature as he was of Indian origin but always wrote in English. He has no self translated literature. He got regardful place in the hearts of Europeans too.

Sri Aurobindo at first in India taught in Baroda College. He took keen interest there in Indian philosophy, education, culture and heritage. There he cultivated patriotism and started writing political articles in straight forward and upright language. This primary medium of expression was kept dormant by him for a few days and he turned towards thoughtful and philosophical literary criticism and creation. He then, kept himself aloof from political writing and involved in discussions and detailed study of the writings of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. In his early pieces only, we find a unique seriousness, depth, balance, imagination and sense of art. The three specific features of Sri Aurobindo's writings are: command over English language, inspiration of cool mind and spiritualism. He has written on distinct topics which are in varied forms; thus has proved that a 'yogi' can adopt any way. Anyone gets inspired by his writings; that might be political, spiritual, prose or poetry.

He leaves Baroda College in 1906 and involves in active politics. He starts to work as the editor of 'Bandemataram', an English periodical. Due to vigorous and highly inspiring articles, he had to go to jails too, but was acquitted of the allegations in courts of law. In the due course of time he came in contact with an ascetic and 'Yogi' Lilli; feels the 'Vedic' and 'Advaitic' sensation. In 1908 for the first four months he keeps himself partially engaged in politics and yogic activities. In this span of time he rejoices internal, soulful peace. He was arrested on 4th May, 1908 in the Alipur case, was imprisoned in Alipur Central Jail. In his cell he was in practice of his yogic activities causing his feeling of presence of 'Narayana' (the Almighty) in each and every thing he looked at in and around. This experience alters his inner thoughts of life. He got his acquittal of the imposed case in 1909 and started to publish the 'Karmayogin', which was 'a weekly review of national Religion, Literature, Science, Philosophy etc.' He lost his interest in politics and deeply influenced by spiritualism and yoga, leaves for Pondicherry in 1910 and lasts till his last. The 'Arya', a monthly was founded there broadly covering three areas: Religion and metaphysics; social, cultural and political issues and literary criticism.

Sri Aurobindo's literary pieces are also engrossed with philosophical, metaphysical and mystical elements. Let us put forward briefly his main view points. Once he depicted- "A Yogi who writes is not a literary man who writes only what the inner will and word want him to express."- he clarifies that a writer is not always the slave of the inner voice or will, but he expresses with the aid of his own wisdom, intellectuality and practical ideas. This view is easily exposed in his writings. The 'Yogic Element' can be found in all of his literary pieces. His noted works are - 'The Life Divine', 'The Synthesis of Yoga', 'The Future Poetry' and he summarizes the themes of these three works in 'Savitri', his crown piece in epic form.

Brief Introduction to these works are-

The Life Divine- This is a massive prophecy with its theme of ‘the affirmation of a divine life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence’. It bridges between the realms of materialism and human consciousness. This is tough to be able to bridge the differences. The ascetics and yogis should not get inclined towards materialism and on the other hand the materialistics do not believe in the existence of soul. Sri Aurobindo, in this book, simplifies and orders the verses of the Rig Veda in a newer way. The central theme of the Vedic scriptures is – Discovery and inculcation of the truth from the darkness of ignorance and with that the victory of eternity.

An eminent Indian critic D.S. Sharma has termed this massive treatise as a ‘Prose- Epic’. He has referred this work as a medium of knowledge, depth in consciousness and the attainment of ‘Sachichidananda’ for the ‘super mind’. We get the formula to peace and self knowledge. Otto Wolff on this regard maintained-“It is not only Indians who see in it the last arch of bridge of human thought and endeavour which leads from the Vedic beginnings to the present and transcends the ordinary limits of human consciousness”. Through this prose – epic, Sri Aurobindo has described the ways to avail the paths of development of the ‘human – consciousness ‘and the ‘super mind’. The mode to regain the lost elements like – Right knowledge, Superpower, Beatitude and Eternity – ‘The Life Divine’.

The Synthesis of Yoga – Sri Aurobindo was much inclined towards ‘Yog- Sadhana’. He reveals in this book that ‘Asanas’, ‘Pranayams’ and ‘Dhyana’ help keep the mind in peaceful state and purifies all evil thoughts. These increase the power of concentration too. ‘Yoga’ means – the communion or ‘Yog’ with the Natural Power and Soul.

He stated ‘Yoga’ as integral. According to his concept of ‘Yoga’ he declared three aspects of it – Yearning, Devotion and Refusal and ‘The Synthesis of Yoga’ has all these aspects and concepts cleared. In a letter he has written – “Suffering is the inevitable result of all worldly desires...” He has maintained that through ‘Yoga’ only one can attain the ‘Super’, ‘Divine’ and ‘Advaita’ and he has declared that this should only be the aim of each and every human being.

The aims of ‘Yoga’:

1. The communion or ‘Yog’ of soul with the Almighty
2. The unity of the ‘Divine’ and the ‘Super Being’
3. To make Individual unity a part of mass or collective unity

We get the ways to reach to the Almighty in this extensive work, ‘more practical in spirit than ‘The Life Divine’

The Future Poetry – This is his treatise on poetry which has less similarity with the traditional or current view. On the future of poetry he dictated: “A larger field of being made more real to man’s experience will be the realm of Future Poetry (F.P. 327)”.

He was in the wish to make poetry divine. For the divinity in poetry he propounded five essential constituent units and those are –

- 1) Truth
- 2) Beauty
- 3) Pleasure
- 4) Life
- 5) Soul

Truth means - Divine Truth which is dynamic, deep spiritual sense and pleasure is poetic pleasure and this is the source of beauty. The holding or bearing power of poetry is its life and soul is the self -realization and exposure through universal consciousness. He has guided and directed the future poetry. He knew that human mind will develop and so was sure about the extensive forms, themes and effect of poetry. Sri Aurobindo discussed poetry as the 'mantra' or 'self –effective language'.

Savitri - 'Savitri' in the form we get, is divided into three parts and twelve books. This is one of the remarkable and much read epics of Indian English Literature. Sri Aurobindo has presented his spiritual experiences in the form of poetry. The cause, it seems so, to present it in the poetic form is – experience, feelings, philosophy need 'rhythm' as a medium to be expressed and poetry can only fulfill this need. 'Supramental' waves can only be bound by poetic rhythm, prose can't make it possible. The highest phase of mental awareness or awakening has been called by Sri Aurobindo as 'Supramental Consciousness'. This description can be found in 'Savitri'.

'Savitri' has collected a entirety of human experiences. It consists of the 'intuitive expressions and views' of man right from the Vedic era to the present, an age of scientific explorations. The Mahabharata hasn't been copied in it but Sri Aurobindo has added a symbol to it; making its title – "SAVITRI-A Legend and A Symbol". In 'Savitri', Savitri is not human but a divine lady. She reaches the state of self - realization through 'Yoga' 'Satyavan' is the symbol of the 'self – realization'. Death has been symbolized as 'unconsciousness'. The central theme of 'Savitri' is 'Bhagavatism'.

Mostly all the writings of Sri Aurobindo reveals his 'Yogic' experiences. His writings of spiritual and religious philosophy were published in the 'Arya' The writings have 'truth' which are due to right union of intellectual and scientific self – experiences; successful and relevant to all ages. 'The Songs to Myrtilla' a poetry written at the tender age of 18, showed his gifted talent. 'Collected Poems and Plays' written in between 1906-10 had also a good impact on the readers at its first publishing. He wrote a fine and famous epic titled 'Iliion' which is based on the 'Trojan War'. Sri Aurobindo translated a number of Sanskrit poems and plays. His acclaimed translated works are –'The Hero and the Nymph' and 'Hymns to the Fire'. Sri Aurobindo wrote a number of plays also. "Basabadutta' reflects his inclination towards Sanskrit and Indian myths.

In the writings of Sri Aurobindo, one can find the unity of past, present and future. He was a master of 'Blank – Verse'. His early blank-verse was enriched with evocative power and rich resilience. Any stormy and fierce situation is rendered with potent and delicate artistry. Let us cite a passage –

"She, o' erborne, Panting, with inarticulate murmurs lay, Like a slim tree
half seen through driving hail, Her naked arms clasping his neck, her

cheek and golden throat averted, and wide trouble In her large eyes
bewildered with their bliss... (154)”.

Sri Aurobindo went beyond the limit of ‘Reason’ and ‘Logic’ (to the extent it is necessary for the development of human – consciousness) and showed the path of spiritual awakening; thus we got such major treatise – The Synthesis of Yoga, The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, The secret of Veda, Essays on the Gita, The Foundations of Indian Culture and The Future Poetry. These works brought great honour to Sri Aurobindo, the ‘Supreme Master of English Prose’.

Sri Aurobindo has contributed a lot to the Indian English Literature and that too with distinction. His contribution is not only to Indian English Literature but to the English Literature. He is unique in his creativity. Sri Aurobindo’s Literature is engrossed with ‘Upanishadic’ thought and it is wet with ‘Truth’. He wrote in elevated language. His central themes consisted of his philosophical and spiritual self – findings. As stated above, he considered poetry as ‘Mantra’ - the spontaneous out burst of thoughts from the core of a truthful heart. He has influenced poets of other languages also- Subramaniya Bharati (Tamil), Nishi Kant (Bengali), Sumitranandan Pant and Ramdhari Singh ‘Dinkar’ (Hindi), Bendre (Kannad), Sundaram and Pujalal (Gujrati).

The writings of Sri Aurobindo show us a conscious way to lead our life and help us gain spiritual power and mental purity which take us towards newer and wider aspects of life. He has revived and discovered the intrinsic philosophy and lessons of the ancient Indian scriptures. He made many a part of the myths, teachings and scriptures easy and simple for the readers to understand and accept. Indian social and moral values, the scriptural thoughts as well have been highlighted by him, heightened too, as these were put forward by him in the global literary platform, giving space to the writers, scholars and critics of India and abroad to talk again on the topics Indian past is honoured and glorified. Thus, he enriched India and Indian English Literature both.

In present context, the works of Sri Aurobindo are much relevant – his literature being the host of a package to let all know the path to be a ‘Superhuman’; which is rare in this age of uncontrolled materialism and artificial business. We find a flow of ‘Neo – Classicism’ in his literary pieces – a glowing, successful unison of ancient and contemporary thoughts which help produce Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Superman’.

Works Cited

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Sri Aurobindo was also a staunch nationalist and a protégé of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III of Baroda. The year 1893 was a remarkable one in Indian history. Two unknown Indians went to the West that year, returning to be among the greatest figures of their times – Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. Much less remembered, is the journey of another young Indian, who undertook the journey in the opposite direction. Aravinda A Ghose, for that is how Sri Aurobindo wrote his name then, sailed from England to India. He was not even 21 and had lived in England for 14 years. Now Baroda would be his base in India for the next 13 years. Sri Aurobindo (Aug. 15, 1872 - Dec. 5, 1950) (born "Aurobindo Akroyd Ghose") was an Indian nationalist, Hindu philosopher, yogi, and poet. He began his career in the Indian nationalist movement to gain freedom from British rule. Shortly thereafter, Aurobindo left politics to pursue a spiritual life. The context of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual endeavors was an India where new Western philosophies – communism, Nietzschean individualism and Freudian sexual hermeneutics – were fashionable and fermenting. Sri Aurobindo was a poet, politician and philosopher. His writings – philosophic and poetic – are Indian in spirit and Western in rhythm and colour. He was the greatest intellectual of our age and a major force for the life of the spirit. India will not forget his services to politics and philosophy. The world will remember with gratitude his invaluable works in the realms of philosophy and religion. Aurobindo was one of the greatest of world figures. Dr RPNishank ji, honorable Education Minister of India writing a book on Sri Aurobindo. The youth of India must be exposed to the writings of Sri Aurobindo and must get inspired by his teachings. Sri Aurobindo Foundation for Indian Culture was live. December 2 at 4:30 AM .